THE SARCEE MAID

On the calm summer evening of 1867 Father Lacombe sat smoking his pipe with the chiefs in a small encampment of Crees. Suddenly the quiet was broken by the war chant of the tribe and young warriors returning from the hunt thundered wildly into camp. They had had a brush with a party of Sarcees and had brought home a prisoner, a young woman whose husband had been killed in the fray.

Proudly she sat her pony alone in the hostile camp. She wore a robe of white deerskin; her dusky hair fell loose about her; her great dark eyes blazed defiance at her foes. Then she espied the good priest sitting among the chiefs. Slipping from her horse she threw herself at his feet, claiming a sanctuary she felt rather than knew. Father Lacombe laid his hand gently upon her head.

"Who owns this young woman?" he inquired.

"I do," one of the young braves stepped forward.

"Sell her to me," said the priest.

"But no, I do not want to sell," replied the young man. "I have no wife, and I have no horses with which to buy one. I want this woman for myself."

"I will give you a horse for her," bargained Father Lacombe," a new coat, leggings, tea and tobacco."

"Ho! Ho!" ejaculated the Indian, "you offer much. You may have her."

"Now," the priest turned to the maid, "you belong to me. You must go where I wish and do as I tell you." The girl nodded submissively.

Already a scheme had flashed into Father Lacombe's astute mind. He would convert the captive maiden then take her back to her people. She should make his welcome certain amongst the southern tribes amongst whom he had longed to build a mission. The Sarcee maid was sent to the sisters at St. Albert where she was treated kindly and learned, during the winter, to talk English and to adopt the ways of the paleface.

When Father Lacombe called at the convent for his maid the following spring the sisters did not want to let her go. "Leave Marguerite with us," they begged.

"No! No!" insisted the priest, "She is gold - pure gold to me. Her people are allied with the Blackfoot nation, which is fierce and proud. They are my friends though they do not love my teaching as the Crees do. But when I bring back Marguerite to them safe and sound... ah! we will see what will happen then."

So Father Lacombe rode south with Alexis, his man; Susanne, an old Blackfoot squaw, and Marguerite. At last they saw a circle of white tepees dotting the slope of a neighbouring coulee. "Those may be my people," ejaculated Marguerite excitedly.

"Good!" exclaimed Father Lacombe. "Raise the red cross flag, Alexis; now get into that tent, Marguerite, and stay there till I tell you to come out."

A few minutes later Indians from the encampment herded over to welcome the Man of the Great Heart. Several were in mourning, shorn of their locks, their faces streaked with black paint.

"For whom are you in mourning?" demanded the cunning prelate.

"Eight months ago," replied the Indians, "your friends, the Cress, attacked our camp. They killed some of our young men and carried off one of our young women."

"And you didn't find her?" asked the priest.

"Her brothers searched all over for her. She has been carried to the Cree country. She may be dead. We shall never see her again."

"Marguerite," called Father Lacombe.

Out sprang the lost maiden, well and happy, delighted at being once again amongst her own people. One glance about, then, with a glad cry, she flew straight into the arms of her mother. What shouts of surprise! What wild rejoicings. The women pressed around Marguerite, the braves about Father Lacombe. They brought him in triumphant procession to their camp where there were songs of rejoicing and orations by the chiefs. Sure enough, as Father Lacombe had anticipated, the story told by Marguerite did more than anything else to solidify his influence amongst the southern tribes who commenced, at last, to listen to his teachings.

THE SARCEE MAID

On the calm summer evening of 1867 Father Lacombe sat smoking his pipe with a group of headmen in a prairie encampment of Plains Crees. Suddenly the quiet was broken by the war chant of the tribe and young warriors, returning from the hunt, thundered wildly into camp. They'd had a brush with a party of Sarcees, and had brought home a prisoner, a young woman whose husband had fallen in the fray.

Proudly she sat her pony in the midst of the hostile camp. She wore a robe of white deerskin, her dusky hair fell loose about her shoulders, while her great dark eyes blazed defiance at her foes. Then she espied the good priest sitting amongst the chiefs. Leaping from her horse she threw herself at his feet, claiming a sanctuary she sensed rather than knew. Gently Father Lacombe laid his hand upon her head.

"Who owns this young woman?" he eyed the painted braves.

"I do," a young warrior stepped jauntily forward.

"Then sell her to me," the priest requested.

"Nemoyah - No! I do not want to sell," came the defiant reply. "I have no wife, and no horse with which to buy one. I want this woman for myself."

"I will give you a horse for her," bargained Father Lacombe, "a new coat, leggings, tea and tobacco."

For a moment the savage pondered deeply. "Ho! Ho!," he ejaculated, "you offer much. You may have her!"

"Now," the priest turned to the maid, "you belong to me. You must go where I wish, and do as I tell you."

The girl nodded submissively.

Already a scheme had flashed into Father Lacombe's subtle mind. He would convert the captive girl, then take her back to her people. She would thus make his welcome certain amongst the southern tribes amongst whom he had long wished to establish a mission. The Sarcee maid was sent to the Sisters at St. Albert, where she was treated kindly, and during the winter learned to talk English and adopt many of the ways of the palefaces.

When Father Lacombe called at the convent for his prisoner the following spring the Sisters didn't want to let her go. "Leave Marguerite with us," they said. "She is making such wonderful progress it would be a pity to take her back to her savage mode of life."

But the Father was adamant. "No! No!", he insisted, "She is gold - pure gold to me! Her people are allied with the fierce and proud Blackfoot nation. They are my friends, though they do not respond to my treatment as the Crees do. But when I bring back Marguerite to them, safe and sound,... ah! we will see what will happen then."

So Father Lacombe rode south with Alexis, his half-breed guide; with Susanne, an old Blackfoot squaw, and Marguerite. At last they sighted a circle of white tepees dotting the slope of a neighbouring coulee. Marguerite could hardly hold herself. "Those may be my people!" she ejaculated, beside herself with excitement.

"Good!" exclaimed Father Lacombe. "Raise the red cross flag, Alexis. Now, get into that tent, Marguerite, and stay there till I tell you to come out."

Within a few minutes Indians from the encampment herded

over in all the barbarous panoply of paint and feathers to welcome "The Man of the Great Heart". Several were in mourning, shorn of their lank locks, their faces streaked with black paint.

"For whom are you in mourning?" demanded the ~~cunning~~ wily prelate.

"Eight months ago," replied the Indians, "your friends, the Crees, attacked our camp. They killed some of our young men, and carried off one of our prettiest young women."

"And you never found her?" asked the priest.

"Her brothers searched all over for her. She has been carried to the Cree country. By now she must be dead. Never shall we see her face again."

"Marguerite!" Father Lacombe raised his voice.

Out of the tent leapt the lost maiden, well and happy, beside herself with joy at hearing once again the guttural tongue of her own people. One glance about then, with a glad cry, she flew straight into the arms of a leathery-faced old crone - her mother!

With shouts of surprise, with wild rejoicing, squaws pressed around Marguerite,and braves about Father Lacombe. In triumphant procession they brought him to their camp where there was a great feast of buffalo humps, tongues and other delicacies, and dancing that continued by the flickering light of campfires till far on into the night.

The priest's long-headed scheme was not long in paying dividends. Word of his action in buying the captive maid from their enemies, and bringing her safely back, spread by moccasin telegraph to the painted tepees of the Blackfeet. Soon the astute Father found more receptive ears into which to pour his teachings.